

I. OUTDOOR RECREATION ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

As North Carolina moves into the 21st century, its growing and changing population will be making increased demands for additional outdoor recreational services. The landscape will become more and more developed as urban areas expand to threaten or surround natural areas and open space. With a budget crisis facing state agencies and reduced federal spending to support outdoor recreation and conservation, providing adequate recreational opportunities and maintaining quality facilities will become much more formidable tasks.

The major park and recreation issues to be addressed over the next five years can be grouped into five categories:

1. Improved Outdoor Recreational Services — The need to provide improved outdoor recreational services to meet the needs of a growing and changing population.
2. Conservation of Natural Resources — The need to conserve and protect important natural resources and open spaces in a rapidly developing state.
3. Funding — The need to ensure a stable and adequate source of funding to provide for the outdoor recreation needs of current and future generations.
4. Partnerships — The need to create effective partnerships between all parties interested in outdoor recreation so they may pursue common interests more effectively.
5. The State Parks System — The need to improve the North Carolina state parks system.

These issues were identified at statewide meetings and through responses to a statewide outdoor recreation issues survey. See Appendix B for a description of how the issues were identified.

IMPROVED OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL SERVICES

Adequate Staffing for Park Areas

Proper operation, maintenance, and programming for parks, recreational areas, and natural areas are essential to providing quality areas, facilities, and recreational opportunities. These tasks cannot be properly performed without adequate staffing. Inadequate manpower such as exists in the state parks system prevents proper care and lessens public use and enjoyment of park areas.

Adequate training is needed to ensure that park and recreation personnel use sound administrative practices and proper technology. Increased funding is needed to provide additional personnel as well as adequate training and salaries. Unfortunately, staff positions and training as well as funds necessary for park operations, maintenance and programming are often the first items to be cut in times of tight budgets such as now faces state and local governments in North Carolina. Such cuts have severely affected the delivery of quality recreational services and park maintenance. This problem is experienced by all levels of public recreation providers.

Even where budget cuts have not affected staffing, rising costs of labor and other park expenses have contributed to under-staffing and deterioration of park areas as maintenance, services, and quality of recreational experiences decline. At the same time, generally heavier use of recreational facilities statewide calls for more staffing.

The fact that recreational resources exist does not necessarily mean they are satisfying the recreational needs of citizens. Proper staffing and programming is often needed to enhance the recreational experience and complement the physical resources. Constructing park facilities no more guarantees optimum recreation than building a schoolhouse guarantees quality education. Just as the complete educational system requires teachers and a curriculum, a balanced outdoor recreational program needs professional staffing and programs to complement its physical resources.

Visible, well-operated programs and special events are among the best ways recreation providers can solicit support and justify their operations.

Dwindling Open Space for Recreational Use

As the state's population and development expand, less open space is available for recreational use while demand for such space rises. This is particularly true in the state's more densely populated areas. Declining open space, combined with the trend of Americans to recreate closer to home, makes the setting aside of open space for close-to-home recreation a major issue. Loss of farmland, trees and open space was identified as one of the top environmental issues for North Carolina in the 2002 Environmental Education Fund General Survey. (Aspinwall et.al., 2002) Open space, in addition to being convenient for recreational purposes, also serves to beautify communities.

With the increasing shift of North Carolina's population to urban areas, the demand for outdoor recreational areas and facilities in and around urban areas is rising, and indications are that this trend will continue. Compounding this situation is the fact that the supply of outdoor recreational areas in many of North Carolina's urban areas is already inadequate to meet current needs.

Acquisition of open space for recreational use, always restricted by limited funds for land acquisition, has become even more difficult as land prices have continued to escalate. Urban communities are finding it increasingly difficult to acquire sufficient open space and recreational land. In some areas, even where funding exists, suitable open space areas are simply not available.

One way to make this problem more manageable is to require all subdivision developers to dedicate a reasonable amount of land for future recreational use. Land that is dedicated, however, should have

recreational usefulness. Where this is not practical, a cash payment, in lieu of actual acreage, could be used for the purchase of suitable park land. North Carolina law already gives local governments the authority to require dedication of open space as land is developed, and several North Carolina cities have found such dedications to be a helpful tool in meeting their open-space needs.

Tax incentives exist that could encourage the gift of open space lands or lesser interests, such as conservation easements. These need to be better publicized. Property may also be donated for altruistic reasons. Indeed, many of North Carolina's state parks, as well as local parks, have been established through generous gifts by citizens. Such sources of open-space areas should not be overlooked.

One area of urban recreation in which significant strides have been made is river-front parks. Several of the state's cities located along rivers — Wilmington and New Bern, for example — have emphasized waterfront parks, and revitalization efforts have been very popular and successful. Other opportunities to create public open space along such river corridors should be seized. Parks and natural areas along rivers also serve to minimize damages due to floods.

The opportunity to combine recreational open space and historical resources should be explored as well. Historic sites and buildings have great recreational potential, and they appeal to residents as well as visitors.

Greenways and trail networks need to be developed to link open space areas and serve multiple uses where such opportunities exist. This should be accomplished with cooperation between all governmental levels. Greenways established along streams may protect water quality by limiting development in sensitive areas, serve as wildlife corridors, and also serve recreational purposes. Trails may also be developed along abandoned railroad right-of-ways.

Deteriorating Park and Recreation Facilities

Operating and maintaining existing outdoor recreational facilities is expensive. These costs — comprised of salaries, energy and other utility expenses, materials, insurance, etc. — continue to rise. Public demand for recreational services has also increased. Simultaneously, recreational facilities have been aging, thus compounding maintenance problems. Many facilities and areas are overused. In the state parks system, many older facilities, built during Depression-era public works programs, need extensive attention. Many Land and Water Conservation Fund-assisted facilities are 20 to 30 years old. Some older facilities, without adequate maintenance, are no longer able to meet former levels of recreational demand. In other cases, increasing operation and maintenance costs have reduced the funds available for other purposes, such as the acquisition of additional open space.

As maintenance levels decline, problems are compounded: Previous levels of demand may not be met; the supply of recreational facilities drops; vandalism increases; the quality of the recreational experience wanes; and park usage sometimes shifts to sites that are newer or better maintained. The resulting heavier use of such alternative sites in turn increases their maintenance needs. Insufficient maintenance levels also increase safety and liability concerns. Monetary awards for damages or

injuries are more likely to be made where accidents were caused by neglected or poorly maintained facilities.

Alternative, steady sources of funding should be explored that would provide for routine maintenance and renovation needs. Surveys have shown that activity and entrance fees are generally acceptable to users if they are convinced that the resulting revenue is being applied to improvements in facilities and programs. As an added benefit, fees have been shown to reduce vandalism. Volunteers and community service workers have been used in some situations to help offset spiraling maintenance costs.

Recreation providers should plan, design, and construct new facilities as well as renovate deteriorating ones, with an eye towards reducing short- and long-term maintenance needs. Routine maintenance and preventative maintenance programs should be followed in order to extend the useful life of facilities and avoid problems that come with neglected maintenance.

Need to Keep Parks Safe and Clean

Clean park areas and facilities enhance visitor enjoyment and help make parks safer, thus reducing liability concerns.

More and more people are visiting state parks, placing a heavier burden on both park maintenance and law enforcement staff. With increased visitation comes an increase in visitor control problems, such as alcohol use, drug abuse, vandalism, and other crime. Providing rangers with law enforcement training and radio communications equipment has helped them to be more efficient in providing for public safety, but additional staffing is needed to minimize undesirable behavior so that it does not inhibit park use.

Littering continues to be a problem in most parks. Several states have found beverage container deposit laws helpful in reducing litter caused by glass bottles, aluminum cans, and plastic containers. With visitors more likely to keep litter-free parks tidy, it pays to keep parks clean and well lighted. Even the design of trash receptacles can make a difference, as attractive containers have proven to be more effective than 55-gallon drums.

Poor upkeep is usually not as evident as littering and vandalism, but it is also a serious problem. Unmowed grass, broken equipment, burned-out lights, deteriorated tennis courts, and broken picnic tables are but a few examples of poor upkeep. Poor upkeep often stems from insufficient operation and maintenance resources. Other factors, such as poor design, also contribute. Visitors are more likely to litter an inadequately maintained park than one that is well kept.

Some communities have met with success by enlisting users to assist in park maintenance. Softball teams and sports associations, for example, may have to commit to maintaining the ballfields. Other communities have had success with hiring neighborhood residents for park watch or maintenance assistance. In other cases, civic clubs have committed to maintaining particular park areas. Many communities have established recycling programs that help reduce littering. Such alternative

maintenance techniques and safety efforts might prove equally successful if they were expanded throughout the state. Whether volunteers or sources such as community service workers are used, it is clear that resources in addition to regular maintenance staff are needed.

Provide Additional Recreational Programs and Facilities

As the state's population continues to increase, demand for more outdoor recreational sites and facilities of all types increases. Also, as land, energy, transportation, and other costs rise, it will become increasingly difficult to fund the operation of new recreational areas and facilities, since funding levels for such purposes traditionally have failed to keep pace with increasing costs.

With limited funding, additional land purchases and new facilities development may not be sufficient to meet future needs. Other areas and facilities will have to be used where possible. Throughout North Carolina, schools are increasingly being used for community purposes, including the use of outdoor areas. Continued and expanded cooperation is needed where it is practical to have such multiple uses. In addition to schools, other public areas might also serve such purposes.

Planning is useful in adding new access points to public waters. For example, when bridges are replaced over rivers and lakes, access to the water can be designed and constructed at minimal additional cost. Where such opportunities are lost, many years will pass before another replacement occurs. As storms and beach erosion destroy the usefulness of certain lots for residential or commercial purposes, opportunities may arise to acquire land for public beach access areas.

The greatest difficulty facing the state parks system has been obtaining adequate and consistent funding to meet the growing public demand for outdoor recreational areas, facilities and programs, and to adequately protect the state's natural heritage.

Recognizing that substantial increases in funding are usually not possible, many state and local governments have sought to establish alternative sources of funding. It is clear that in order to provide more recreational programs and facilities, additional funding is necessary. While careful evaluation of program priorities and allocation of available recreation dollars to meet the greatest needs is wise and prudent in order to extend budgets, that alone is not enough.

With the increasing urbanization of North Carolina's population, the demand for outdoor recreation facilities and programs in urban areas is rising. Indications are that this trend will continue. Adding to the problem of meeting such increasing needs is the fact that the supply of recreational offerings in many of North Carolina's urban areas is already inadequate. Many smaller communities throughout the state also face a shortage of recreational facilities and programs.

The fact that recreational resources exist does not necessarily mean that they are satisfying the needs of visitors. Proper staffing and programming is often needed to enhance the recreational experience and complement the physical resources. Highly visible and well-operated programs, in addition to meeting recreational needs, are among the best ways that recreation providers can garner support and justify their operations. Good programs result in customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction

translates into appreciation of recreational agencies and their programs and facilities.

Assess Demographics and Public Demands

Good information continues to be essential if recreational resources are to be maximized. In planning new outdoor recreation areas or in planning the expansion or renovation of existing ones, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of which resources are actually available and which are needed. Such supply and demand information is needed at both state and local levels.

Supply and demand must be regularly assessed in order to determine priorities for outdoor recreation needs throughout the state. Sufficient resources need to be devoted to gathering accurate and comprehensive information on recreational need.

In order to anticipate and plan for changes in recreational demand, recreational trends must be monitored. The general aging of the population and the taking of more frequent vacations of shorter duration and closer to home are examples of such trends.

Planning for park and recreational areas must involve active public input to help ensure that development corresponds with public desires. Such public contact can also have the side benefit of informing the public and generating support so that plans ultimately become implemented.

North Carolina's coastal areas have developed at astounding rates. For example, during the past 25 years, recreational boating has experienced tremendous growth, but the number of access ramps and parking spaces have not grown to keep pace with the demand. Changing demand such as this can and should be recognized and incorporated into planning efforts.

Increasing Liability Insurance Costs

The much-publicized inability of many providers to obtain or afford adequate liability insurance coverage poses a serious threat to the existence of programs provided by public agencies, private businesses, and also to the professionals who operate and maintain recreational resources. Liability issues can also affect board members, volunteers, and other personnel who are indirectly involved in providing recreational services.

Some of the major factors that can contribute to the problem include poor risk management on the part of recreation providers, the litigiousness of today's society, lack of maintenance or renovation funds, insufficient numbers of personnel, inadequately trained personnel, and poor management by insurance companies. Keeping facilities in a good state of repair, designing facilities to minimize or eliminate potential problems, periodic inspection programs, and adequately trained staff all serve to lessen potential liability.

It seems unlikely that civil justice reforms, often touted by the insurance industry, are the answer.

The number of large awards is not high. Large judgements, however, are certainly well publicized, and, in recent years, there have been increases in the number of law suits filed for personal injuries in all aspects of business, leisure pursuits, and government. No facet of government or business, including recreational providers, is truly immune from potential liability issues in such a litigation-oriented society. In North Carolina, some cities and counties have joined together to purchase liability insurance. Under North Carolina law, the state and local governments are protected by the sovereign immunity doctrine, which means that no liability claim can be sustained against the state or its political subdivisions. Employees are not so protected, however. North Carolina law also allows local governments to waive their sovereign immunity to the extent of their liability insurance, and most local governments have purchased some liability insurance.

Even so, some higher-risk recreational programs have been dropped because of liability concerns. Premiums have also risen, although they generally have dropped below the levels of a few years ago, and fewer companies are seeking to write liability business.

Depreciative Behavior

Depreciative behavior such as littering, vandalism, and crime continues to cost the taxpayer. For one thing, dealing with such behavior and its aftermath ties up scarce funds that could otherwise go towards meeting facility or operational needs. There is also an intangible but very real cost: the diminished recreational experience that results from visits to abused areas.

Various methods of dealing with litter have been tried, including the use of criminal statutes, signs, more trash cans, and attractive trash receptacles. Although these have helped, litter has proven to be a stubborn problem. Solid waste laws have been effective in several states, as have recycling efforts. Education and media promotion appeal to citizens to respect and care for public lands and help address littering as well as vandalism problems.

When new facilities are planned, they should be designed to reduce depreciative behavior, and older facilities, where possible, should be renovated to minimize such effects. Techniques such as recessed lighting, hard-to-scratch surfaces, and sturdy equipment should become standard. Realistically, as long as people are visiting parks, some litter and malicious destruction of property can be expected. Nevertheless, steps should be taken to minimize such behavior.

A basic law-and-order approach, including posting signs and catching and prosecuting violators, is still appropriate. Visibility of park law enforcement or other staff is important, as is good park maintenance, since visitors tend to treat well-maintained areas with more respect.

Park-watch programs, where park neighbors or others help keep an eye on park areas and facilities, have proven successful. Recruiting citizens who live adjacent to park areas to perform maintenance or caretaker functions has also been effective. Controlling access to park areas can also reduce depreciative behavior.

Litter, vandalism, vehicle damage, property theft, assaults, drug use, and other illegal activities

discourage legitimate park visitors from using parks. Parks and recreation providers must emphasize prevention of such acts in an attempt to reduce such problems.

Greater Public Accessibility

While it is not feasible for every section of every park and recreation site or every program to be accessible to everyone, efforts are being made to provide equivalent opportunities for people with special needs to participate in the full spectrum of outdoor recreational experiences. Inadequate access to park and recreation areas and facilities and inadequate programs limit the opportunities of those persons with special needs.

People with special needs include, among others, the elderly, children, the mobility-impaired, and individuals who are visually, mentally, or hearing impaired. Agencies that receive federal funds are legally mandated to make facilities and programs accessible to persons with disabilities (i.e., Architectural Barriers Act of 1968/Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973). Title II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 requires that public services and accommodations be accessible. ADA extends the prohibition of disability discrimination to all activities of state and local governments, including those that do not receive federal financial assistance. Current estimates indicate that approximately 12 percent of the population have disabilities that significantly impact their daily lives, including their leisure lifestyle. According to North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 168-2:

Handicapped persons have the same right as the able-bodied to the full and free use of the streets, highways, sidewalks, walkways, public buildings, and facilities, both publicly and privately owned, which serve the public.

Although state and federal laws (P.L. 90-480 and P.L. 101-336 [ADA]) require barrier-free design in all new public facilities, some accessibility problems remain in areas and facilities developed prior to passage of these laws. As funds are available on the local and state levels, continued modifications of existing facilities are being completed to help eliminate barriers and encourage facility use by all populations.

Since 1977, North Carolina has made giant strides toward the inclusion of persons with special needs in activities and services provided its citizens. In 1990, a cooperative program of public agencies and the private sector produced the second edition of *Access, North Carolina*, a vacation and travel guide for disabled persons. Parking, entrances, interior, exterior, restrooms, and other accessibility ratings were done for general interest sites, skiing areas, waterfalls, historic sites, outdoor dramas, recreational areas, forests, and state parks throughout North Carolina. The publication is distributed through the N.C. Division of Travel and Tourism.

Land and Water Conservation Fund recipients in North Carolina – counties, municipalities, and state agencies with 50 or more full-time employees – have developed accessibility self-evaluations of programs, policies, and facilities in order to achieve compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and ADA. Where self-evaluations determined that facility renovation or construction was required in order to achieve accessibility, a transition plan was required.

The transition plans, developed with the assistance of persons with special needs or affiliated organizations, were required to do the following:

- identify physical obstacles limiting accessibility;
- describe the methods that will be used to make facilities accessible;
- schedule the steps necessary to achieve full program accessibility;
- indicate the person responsible for plan implementation; and
- be kept on file for public inspection.

The self-evaluations and transition plans were designed to allow movement towards full accessibility in order to provide better opportunities for North Carolina's approximately one million elderly and handicapped citizens. According to ADA, any structural modifications identified in a transition plan must have been completed by January 1995. Integration of individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of society is fundamental to providing full accessibility.

While not as visible or as well-defined as architectural barriers, community attitudes are often barriers to full participation in outdoor recreation for those people with special needs. Common examples of attitude barriers are the assumptions that certain disabilities, whether physical or mental, automatically limit participation in recreational activities.

The trend towards an increasingly older population will place special demands on public recreational facilities. Traditionally, many communities have geared their parks around children and young adults. An increased emphasis on meeting the needs of older citizens may well be warranted as the state's elderly population grows.

CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

North Carolina's natural resources help make the state a special place to live and to visit. These resources are highly valued by citizens and visitors alike who cherish the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors by visiting national and state parks and historic sites, traveling along the Blue Ridge Parkway, surf casting and fishing in lakes and streams, viewing forests and bucolic settings, enjoying the beaches and mountains, and learning through environmental interpretation and education. Love of the state's natural heritage and increased awareness and concern for the environment, in combination with rapid population growth and urban sprawl, have made the conservation and protection of natural resources a critical issue in NC.

Recognizing this issue, the recently created Office of Conservation and Community Affairs within the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources is taking the lead in developing and implementing a comprehensive statewide conservation plan – *One North Carolina Naturally* – that involves the public, governmental agencies, and private organizations. The plan, now underway, will focus on maintaining functional ecosystems, biological diversity and working landscapes through the stewardship of land and water resources. Plan implementation should help conserve and restore the state's natural heritage and sustain a healthy environment for all North Carolinians and visitors.

Development of the plan is timely. While some progress has been made in conserving and protecting

the state' s natural resources during the past five years, that progress has been overshadowed by even more rapid destruction of North Carolina' s natural landscapes and natural resources. The natural areas that received protection during the past few years are only a few of the many areas that merit attention. The protected areas are far outnumbered by others that are threatened, damaged, or destroyed. The process of urban development, forest cutting and clearing, and resource exploitation is degrading and even eliminating North Carolina' s natural landscapes and wildlife habitats on a broad-reaching scale.

The great majority of North Carolina' s most important natural landscapes and habitats have no assurances of protection. In many cases, their owners are neither aware of the ecological resources on their properties, nor do they understand their options for protecting the land. Public funding for the inventory, protection, and management of significant natural lands and biological resources has been modest. Public and private funds are generally insufficient to purchase more than a few important natural areas annually even from willing sellers. Managers of parks, forests, refuges, and wildlife conservation areas usually lack the financial and personnel resources to maintain and protect the natural resources. Many natural areas are being damaged by timber cutting, off-road vehicles, vandalism, too frequent pine-straw raking, arson, littering, and other uncontrolled and inappropriate public uses.

Issues and proposed recommendations regarding conservation of natural resources are addressed in further detail in Chapter V, Natural Diversity Preservation, and Chapter VI, Wetlands Protection.

Expanded Protection of Important Natural Resources

Development of natural lands is occurring at a rapid pace and on a vast scale throughout our state. Particularly heavy destruction is occurring to coastal maritime forests, upland hardwood forests, river bottomland forests, longleaf pine forests, Carolina bays, mountain bogs, and mountaintop grassy balds.

Protecting and maintaining water quality in North Carolina' s streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries, and wetlands are critical. Nearly half the state' s rare and endangered species are dependent on wetland and aquatic habitats. Deterioration of water quality may cause the extinction of many native fish, mollusks, amphibians, and other water-dependent plants and animals. Wetlands, especially isolated freshwater types, remain vulnerable to development and drainage. The state has no freshwater wetland protection statutes and enforcement program.

We must act to save what is left of North Carolina' s natural diversity. Sixty-three plant and animal species in the state are considered endangered or threatened, and several hundred other species are vulnerable. Nearly half the state' s natural ecosystem types are considered rare and threatened in North Carolina or worldwide, and less than a third of the state' s most important natural areas are assured of protection. (See Chapter V, Natural Diversity Preservation, for a more detailed discussion and specific recommendations.)

General concern for the environment is not just a North Carolina issue, but a national one as well.

Americans surveyed “...rank the environment third on their list of critical public issues requiring governmental support, just behind crime and education. Sixty percent feel that the government spends too little on the environment.” (National Opinion Research Center, 2000) Environmental concerns and interests have resulted in nine percent of southern Americans age 16 or older regularly contributing to or participating in organized conservation group activities. Twenty-seven percent regularly read nature magazines and over 52 percent regularly recycle. (National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, 2000)

Loss of farmland, trees and open space was one of the top environmental issues identified in the Environmental Education Fund General Survey. Air quality and polluted runoff were also top environmental concerns. Fifty-three percent of people surveyed thought that North Carolina’s government is not spending enough money on the environment, while only 6.2 percent thought too much money is spent. (Aspinwall et.al., 2002)

Expressions of public support for conservation and protection of natural resources have not been confined to public surveys. Recent years have shown a high success rate statewide and nationwide at the ballot box for park and open space initiatives. Seven of nine open space bond referenda have passed in North Carolina since 1997.

On November 7, 2000, Wake County voters gave overwhelming support to a \$15 million open space bond issue, passing it with a 76 percent affirmative vote. Citizens of Wake County – one of North Carolina’s fastest growing areas – sent a clear message that the most important natural areas in the county should be preserved. Funds raised through the bond referendum will assist in acquiring and preserving land to protect water resources, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Deterioration of Park Resources Due to Overuse

Pressures on public park lands and waters that are under conservation protection have become intense. High population growth rates, increasing development on the peripheries of the parks, and heavier public use of the inadequate number of parks have brought a host of threats to the natural resources of our state’s parks. Heavy visitor use, pollution, and activities of adjacent land owners are just a few of the many threats facing park lands and resources.

Some progress has been made. In the late 1980s, \$15.3 million was spent to acquire critical acres at existing state parks, and other smaller appropriations followed. In November 1993, \$35 million in state park bonds were approved to fund capital improvements and land acquisition projects. The state has also established several dedicated funds and land owner incentive programs to support conservation efforts, but more needs to be done.

Resource Degradation Caused by Increased Development

North Carolina faces current and increasing threats to its natural resources. Large amounts of land are being developed across the state, particularly in and around metropolitan areas. Between 1992 and 1997, 781,500 acres were developed statewide, roughly 156,000 acres annually. Moreover, the pace of development has increased. From 1982 to 1992, an average of 93,580 acres per year was developed.

The most comprehensive analysis of development in the United States, based on a three year study by researchers at Cornell and Rutgers universities, ranked Greensboro second and Raleigh third most sprawling of 83 metro areas examined. The report used 22 variables to rate metro areas on four development aspects: residential density; neighborhood mix of homes, jobs, and services; strength of activity centers and downtown; and accessibility of the street network. (Smart Growth America, 2002) Indicative of such sprawl and development, North Carolina's twenty-five largest cities annexed 471 square miles from 1990 to 2003. (N.C. Office of State Budget and Management) Between 1992 and 1997, North Carolina ranked fourth nationwide in the amount of high-quality farmland lost. (America Farmland Trust)

The forests, agricultural lands, coastal areas, marine resources, diverse natural areas, wildlife habitats and clean air and water all contribute to the environmental quality citizens of and visitors to North Carolina enjoy and depend upon. Although important steps have been and are being taken to protect natural resources, much more remains to be done if a healthy natural environment is to be maintained and natural resource protection is to be improved.

Many of the state's major natural ecosystems and critical resources are not represented in the state parks system. In addition, those sensitive and outstanding natural resources that are represented in the parks system should be better protected. The State Parks Systemwide Plan shows that the majority of the state's major biological, geological, recreational, archaeological, and scenic resource "themes" are inadequately represented or protected in the existing state parks. Current inventories indicate that over 32,000 acres are needed to complete land acquisition at the current park units, and new park units are needed to serve our growing population and to adequately preserve our natural heritage.

Local government needs for resource protection and open space are also great. Local government grant requests for funding assistance to various state and federal grant resources continue to exceed available grant funds.

Outdoor Recreation in Appropriate Settings

The public's interests in outdoor recreational activities are diverse and sometimes conflicting. Accommodating such diverse recreational activities in natural resource-oriented parks such as those in the N.C. state parks system will require careful planning to minimize damage to sensitive natural resources and special natural areas. It may also require increasing the number and variety of state park units to meet the public need and demand for outdoor recreation.

Providing a diverse array of parks and park facilities would serve a wider range of public recreational needs and help expand the state park system' public constituency. A broader and larger public constituency can, in turn, help build political support for substantial increases in public funding for park land acquisition and maintenance. It is possible to develop a state parks system that offers a diversity of units — some that accommodate large numbers of visitors, and others that limit use and primarily protect and preserve natural areas.

Respondents to the survey identified the following needs:

- acquire and develop more park units to provide recreational opportunities that might be inappropriate in the existing state parks system;
- locate recreational facilities without degrading important natural resources; and
- provide and develop recreation areas to take public-use pressures off more important natural areas.

More Interpretation and Education Programs

A key element of environmental protection is the awareness and support of our state' citizens. If people are ignorant of the need for environmental protection laws and programs, they may view them as unnecessary and costly burdens. They may then oppose enactment of such laws and may, knowingly or unknowingly, violate existing laws. If people are educated about environmental processes and the adverse effects of various activities, however, they will be more likely to support and uphold laws and programs needed to protect the environment.

If an environmental ethic is to be instilled in citizens, it must begin by educating children. Children who are taught to appreciate the sensitive and complex nature of the environment are likely to grow into responsible adults who care for the earth rather than exploit it, citizens of the earth who feel a genuine sense of stewardship for their natural heritage.

An environmental education survey released in Summer 2002 by The Environmental Education Fund shows strong support from the general public for environmental education in North Carolina. Ninety-four percent of respondents surveyed felt that environmental education should be taught in schools, and 86 percent wanted to learn more about the environmental consequences of their everyday decisions. Environmental education was seen as important for both adults (89 percent) and children (91 percent). (Aspinwall et.al., 2002)

Many state agencies offer educational materials or programs to our schools and the public at large on environmental processes, natural resources, and conservation. Among them are the North Carolina Zoological Park; the Wildlife Resources Commission' s educational division; the North Carolina Aquariums; the Division of Forest Resources' educational forests; the Division of Soil and Water Conservation; and the Division of Parks and Recreation. Exhibits at the State Fair and other special events also educate the public. Such efforts are coordinated by an adopted environmental

education plan headed by the Office of Environmental Education. The Environmental Education Fund General Survey showed, however, that the general public is not aware of these resources. Clearly improvement is needed in making citizens aware of such resources.

The state parks system is uniquely qualified to promote stewardship of North Carolina's natural and cultural heritage and to serve as a model of environmental education. Its educational potential is largely unrealized, however. Although significant progress has been made in recent years to add visitor centers and interpretive displays at state park units, many parks have only a few minimal interpretive displays.

Participants in the Parks and Recreation Issues Survey and the Environmental Education Survey gave high priority to environmental educational programs and recommended:

- increasing environmental education in the public schools;
- providing more interpretive and educational facilities in the state parks and other public recreational areas;
- seeking more funding for park interpretive centers and environmental educators;
- combining efforts with other state agencies, especially the Department of Public Instruction, to develop an environmental education curriculum and to encourage more use of state parks by public schools; and
- expanding efforts to make the public aware of the existing network of environmental education resources.

FUNDING

Funding for parks and recreation was the highest priority issue identified by the SCORP Parks and Recreation Issues Survey. Funding is needed to address many of the other problems identified in this chapter. Low staffing levels, large backlogs of maintenance projects, threatened natural areas, and insufficient visitor facilities are all problems arising from years of inadequate funding.

Many changes are occurring in North Carolina, and these changes will affect parks and recreation. The population is growing and becoming more urban, educated and affluent. Senior citizens, a fast-growing segment of the U.S. population, are particularly attracted to North Carolina for its climate and natural landscape. The rapid development of previously rural areas and highly publicized environmental problems, such as threatened water supplies and trash washing ashore on ocean beaches, are increasing environmental concerns.

Citizens expect high quality park and recreation opportunities as well as greater natural resource protection. Adequate and stable funding is critical to the provision of quality outdoor recreation services in North Carolina. Funding is essential to develop, staff, and maintain existing parks, protect

natural resources, and expand services to meet future needs.

North Carolina has traditionally been a fiscally conservative state, and it lags behind the national average for public park and recreation spending. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, per capita funding for parks and recreation by state and local agencies in North Carolina is well below the national average. State and local funding requests for LWCF and PARTF assistance to acquire park acreage and develop recreational facilities continue to be significantly higher than available funds.

Local governments have greatly differing abilities to finance recreation. Large metropolitan areas throughout the Piedmont offer high levels of service, while some counties in other more rural areas do not even have a publicly supported recreation department. Funding for state agencies providing park and recreation services was minimal for many years.

The funding outlook has improved for both state and local governments. Passage of a 1993 bond referendum provided \$35 million for state park system land acquisition and capital improvements. The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund has also provided a significant boost to both state and local agencies. The Natural Heritage Trust Fund and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund have also provided much needed funds since their establishment. The state parks operating budget, however, still continues to be at or near the bottom of all states in per capita spending and ranks next-to-last in the southeast. (Figure I-1)

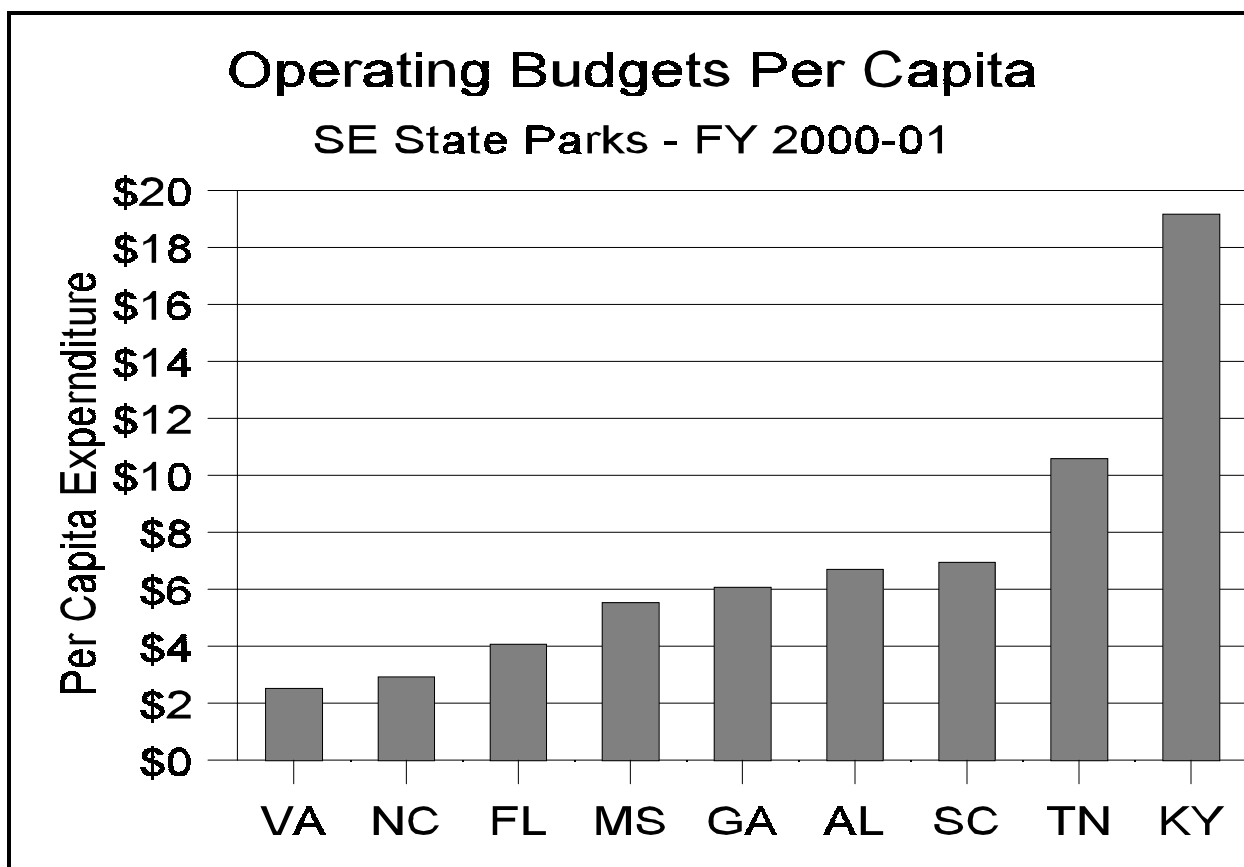


Figure I-1. SE States Per Capita Operating Budgets

Federal LWCF Funding

Prior to establishment of the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) had been the most significant single source of park acquisition and development funds for state and local governments in North Carolina for over 35 years. Federal LWCF grants have provided over \$64 million for projects in 96 North Carolina counties to establish and enhance state and local parks. Many local recreation agencies were established, and many communities were encouraged to provide park and recreation areas for the first time because matching grant money was available. Agencies were able to encourage significant private donations because the matching grants doubled the value of the gift. Grants also aided state park land acquisition and recreation facility development.

Unfortunately, LWCF appropriations declined dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s (Figure I-2). Funding was eliminated for four straight years before being reinstated in 2000. Hopefully, this important source of funding for state and local parks will once again be funded at a level that will provide significant assistance to North Carolina parks.

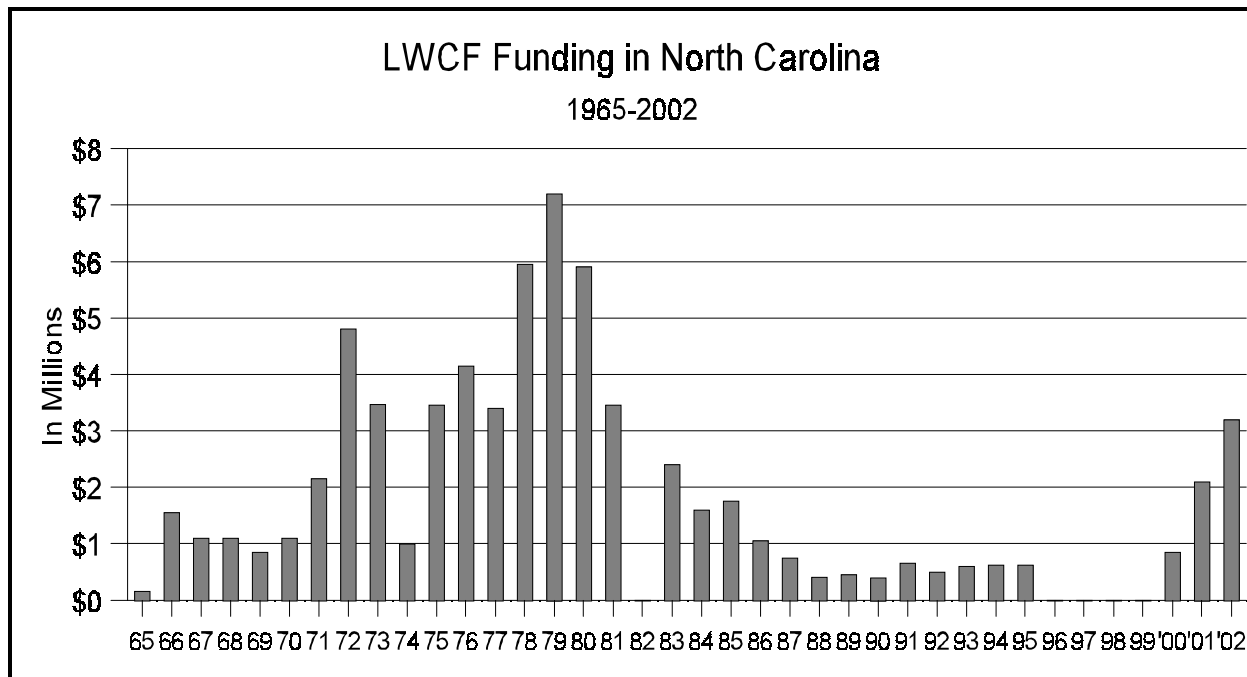


Figure I-2. Land & Water Conservation Fund Assistance

North Carolina Has Created Several Dedicated Funds

In light of shrinking federal assistance during the 1980s and 1990s, North Carolina and over half of all states established dedicated funding sources for recreation from sources such as bonds, real-estate transfer taxes, user fees, state sales taxes, income tax write-offs, and mineral severance taxes. Other states have established funds dedicated to preserving open space. Several states have set aside money to acquire and convert abandoned railroad lines to long-distance trail corridors. In the last 15 years, North Carolina has taken major steps to provide ongoing sources of park and conservation funds with

the establishment of the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. Continuation of these trust funds is critical to the future of outdoor recreation and conservation in North Carolina.

Natural Heritage Trust Fund

The Natural Heritage Trust Fund (NHTF) was established in North Carolina in 1987 with minimal funding. In 1989, the trust fund received dedicated funding from a \$10 increase in the motor vehicle personalized license plate fee and since 1991, funds from a portion of the deed stamp tax. Since 1987, over \$73.8 million in grants has been awarded for the purchase of natural areas and wildlife habitats. The NHTF has helped the Division of Parks and Recreation acquire a significant amount of state park acreage and assisted the Wildlife Resources Commission and other state agencies in land acquisition as well. The NHTF has funded forty-seven natural heritage inventory projects and contributed to the acquisition of more than 15,000 acres of state park system land. Funds available for grants during FY 2001-02 were reduced by \$2 million due to a transfer of funds to help meet the state's budget deficit.

Parks and Recreation Trust Fund

The North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) provides state parks and local governments with a reliable funding source for projects such as ADA modifications to existing recreational facilities. All new and renovated facilities and areas receiving PARTF assistance must be accessible to people with special needs.

The problem with stable and adequate funding for parks and recreation prompted various park and recreation support groups and individuals to come together in support of establishing a state trust fund to address park and recreation needs. In 1994, the N.C. General Assembly established the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF). PARTF provides money for capital improvements, repairs, renovations, and land acquisition. Both state parks and local governments may use the money. The funding source is a portion of the state's real-estate deed transfer tax. Thirty percent of the funds provide matching grants to local governments and 65 percent goes to the state parks system. Five percent goes to the coastal beach and estuarine access program.

In 1995, the N.C. General Assembly passed legislation dedicating the state's share of the real estate deed transfer tax, \$1 per \$1,000 valuation, to the PARTF and the Natural Heritage Trust Fund. PARTF receives 75 percent of the dedicated funds and the Natural Heritage Fund receives 25 percent.

PARTF has become the most important funding source for state parks and a major source for local government parks. Through 2001, PARTF has provided \$84.5 million for land acquisition and capital improvement projects for state park units; \$33 million in grants to local governments; and \$3.7 million for the Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront program. Funds available for grants during FY 2001-02 were reduced by \$5 million due to a transfer of funds to help meet the state's budget deficit.

Clean Water Management Trust Fund

The 1996 General Assembly created the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) (G.S. 113-145) “to clean up pollution in the state’s surface waters and to protect and conserve those waters that are not yet polluted.” State agencies, local governments or other political subdivisions of the state, and non-profit conservation organizations – such as land trusts – may apply for grants. Projects must “...specifically address water pollution problems and focus on upgrading surface waters, eliminating pollution and protecting and conserving unpolluted surface waters, including urban drinking water supplies.” Projects funded are building a network of riparian buffers and greenways for environmental, educational and recreation benefits.

As of December 1, 2000, 234 grants totaling \$211 million have been approved from the over \$700 million in requests. These grants have helped protect 1560 miles of riparian buffers and 134,673 acres of land statewide. Clean water, however, remains a top priority issue. In coastal areas of the state, respondents to the 2002 Environmental Education Survey felt that polluted runoff was the state’s most significant environmental problem. CWMTF monies were also reduced during FY 2001-02 to help address the state’s budget deficit.

Funding Summary

While tremendous progress has been made during the past 15 years to address recognized funding shortfalls for both state agencies and local governments, a backlog of needs still exists. The State Park System has 271 identified capital improvement projects totaling over \$303 million, and the State Park System needs 27,750 acres to complete existing parks at an estimated cost of over \$123 million. Local government requests for PARTF grants continue to be much higher than available funds. The Million Acre Initiative was passed by the General Assembly but without additional funding. The State Park Expansion Plan has identified 40 high priority sites. The CWMTF estimates that over \$10.5 billion is needed to protect and restore water quality in North Carolina.

Increased outdoor recreation funding is needed to address North Carolina’s current and future outdoor recreation needs. Continuation and full funding for the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund are critical to continued progress for outdoor recreation and conservation in North Carolina.

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Increasing Awareness and Appreciation

North Carolina's Outdoor Heritage

Americans enjoy the outdoors as a place to "get away from it all," to escape, to renew and refresh. Perhaps this is a modern way of expressing the freedom our forefathers sought in their quest for a new life. The President's Commission on Americans Outdoors alluded to these vital connections between our national spirit and the American landscape, suggesting that no mere accident of history matched a national character of independence, generosity, and ingenuity with a land of opportunity and vast abundance.

Americans have come to take the outdoors for granted, however. The expansiveness of the outdoors and of public lands reserved and protected for all time has encouraged complacency. The challenge now is not to tame the land, but to refrain from destroying it.

There is a need for an American outdoor ethic – a feeling of appreciation and responsibility for the air, land, water, and all living things of the earth. An outdoor ethic includes consideration for others using the outdoors, and stewardship – the obligation to ensure future generations' enjoyment of our natural heritage.

An outdoor ethic is essential because wildlands preserve a variety of plants and animals that may prove vital to human survival. Species as yet unknown or unresearched may one day be needed for food, medicine, or fiber. Natural areas contribute to clean air and water, preserve gene pools of species and ecosystems, and ensure the availability of wilderness recreation in the future.

The Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

How is the value of outdoor recreation measured? The real value of the outdoors is its enhancement of people's lives. When a sports program keeps a teenager away from drugs, when a neighborhood park offers a friendly gathering place for older people, when families learn to appreciate each other on a camping trip, when exercise improves general health, what is the value?

The greatest values of the outdoors are intensely personal and cannot be expressed in dollars. Can a price be assigned to a beautiful sunset or a splendid scenic panorama? The value of a solitary walk along the beach or a family picnic in the woods is difficult to compare with the value of housing and commercial uses. But beach fronts, river banks, wooded areas, wetlands, and open spaces are disappearing at an accelerating rate. As North Carolina becomes more developed, the value of the natural landscape is increasingly apparent.

It is difficult to appreciate the full impact an investment in recreation has on area economies. Open space set aside for recreation enhances the appeal of community developments. Better

understanding of the economic benefits encourage private enterprise and local governments to cooperate in an effort to expand outdoor recreational opportunities. The Third Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan acknowledged that, "*Recreation opportunities affect choices of where people will live and work and where corporate America chooses to grow.*"

North Carolina's outdoor recreation opportunities are a significant factor in attracting business and industry to the state and are a major attraction for tourists. The state has one of the oldest state park systems, a state zoo, strong municipal and county park and recreation systems, state forests, and national parks, forests, and seashores. Private and commercial recreation providers offer diverse outdoor recreation opportunities, such as whitewater rafting, downhill skiing, and boating.

Education

People shape and change their values based on information and experience. The public needs basic knowledge about the importance of the outdoors, and it needs to directly experience the outdoors to forge an emotional commitment to an outdoor ethic.

An outdoor ethic is essential to ensure that our efforts to preserve and enjoy the outdoors are carried forward by future generations. We must understand that all our actions affect the outdoors and the other people we share it with, and learn to accept our responsibilities as stewards.

—Report and Recommendations
President's Commission on Americans Outdoors

The 1993 General Assembly enacted the North Carolina Environmental Education Act. That legislation called on DEHNR to work with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), other government agencies, business and industry, educational institutions and citizens' groups to develop a statewide environmental education program.

The state's new environmental education plan has 14 objectives:

- enhance environmental education for adults;
- establish a North Carolina environmental education clearinghouse;
- correlate environmental education with DPI's curriculum;
- promote environmental education centers;
- expand funding for environmental education in schools;
- provide environmental education for government agencies;
- integrate ecological concepts in higher education;
- reward professional development in environmental education;
- measure North Carolina's environmental stewardship;
- identify model environmental education resource materials;
- use North Carolina data to enrich environmental education;
- build partnerships for environmental education;
- enhance environmental education for student teachers; and

- develop media participation in environmental education.

Role of the State Parks System

The Division of Parks and Recreation seeks to provide environmental education to school children through its interpretive and education programs. Many curriculum objectives of North Carolina's Basic Education Program relate directly to the Division's objectives of providing outdoor recreation opportunities and preserving the state's unique natural and cultural heritage. Opportunities to expand these programs should be pursued through increased funding and greater cooperation.

School children must learn about the importance of the natural world. Educating children can also be an effective method for teaching parents. All citizens should be aware of the outdoors as a source of inspiration, health, and economic security.

Public land managers have a responsibility to make park and recreation areas into outdoor learning centers – through programs, signs, brochures, guidebooks, interpretive trails, and personal example – to promote the proper use of the outdoors. Education and interpretation are important services. Many of the values of magnificent natural areas or historic sites may be lost to visitors unless they are "opened up" by a guidebook or an interpreter.

The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation has developed an environmental education learning experience (EELE) for each state park and recreation area. Each of these activity packets is based on one of the park or recreation area's primary features or themes and is correlated to the Department of Public Instruction curriculum. Each EELE has pre-park visit, on-site, and post-park visit activities, which have measurable objectives, background information, vocabulary, references, and step-by-step instructions to the activities.

Park Information

North Carolina needs to develop a public relations/marketing campaign which tells the public what currently exists and what is needed. Some parks are overused while others are under-used. Many times the public response at the under-used park is, "I didn't know that park existed."

—Municipal Park and Recreation Director

Information on the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities is necessary to promote participation. Many parks and recreation departments in other states have developed marketing strategies in conjunction with statewide tourism programs. State park systems have adopted slogans; redesigned park flyers and pamphlets; produced cassettes that are circulated widely to communities and conferences; produced an array of caps, buttons, t-shirts, and shopping bags with logos and slogans; and streamlined and modernized reservation systems with the latest electronic technology. Some park systems are hiring marketing managers (*State Parks in a New Era*, Myers).

Regardless of the administrative approach, whether by one department or by a coalition of recreation providers, effective marketing can accomplish many objectives:

- increase public awareness of outdoor recreation opportunities;
- reduce pressures on heavily used parks by providing information about lesser-known units;
- promote a regional approach to tourism; and
- help build constituencies of in-state visitors who support the parks.

The goal of increased information and awareness can also be reached by using existing media to promote outdoor opportunities. Public service announcements and feature stories in newspapers and on television are cost-effective ways to inform people of their local and regional recreational resources.

Advocates and Partners

"We need to take on the role of advocates in our communities to spread the good word," said one educator in talking about parks and recreation. We need to preserve "special places" that are important to us, and we must provide recreational programs and facilities for future generations by working together in our own communities, where we live, work and play.

"Communities" can also mean communities of interest as well as geographic communities. Associations are needed with other groups of similar interests, such as sports clubs, neighborhood associations, planners, and non-profit organizations – civic groups, garden clubs, local officials, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, recreational associations, and conservation organizations of a geographic community. In the words of one New Bern public workshop participant, *"We must bring together diverse recreation groups to work towards improved outdoor recreation."* A core constituency – everyone who is interested in the outdoors and recreation – would center around this common cause.

Communities must organize to invest in recreational opportunities for the future and to protect our outdoor heritage. To build a plan of action, a community must first have a vision for the future – deciding what opportunities it wants to provide, what "special places" to set aside – determine priorities, set goals, and then assess tools available and needed to reach those goals.

People are taking more control over decisions and actions that affect the quality of their lives because they know their own needs best and are often best-qualified to make decisions to meet them. As reflected by the trend towards decentralization in government, political authority is increasingly centered at the state and local levels. Often, citizen advisory boards are used in many service areas of local government.

Many communities and counties have park and recreation boards and commissions already established. The success of any park and recreation organization is largely dependent upon the effort, commitment, and competency of its citizen board members. These members often serve in key community leadership positions and are critical resources. Citizen board members must understand their responsibility to provide visionary, proactive leadership based on their

knowledge of how park and recreation services improve the quality of life in their communities. Citizen board members must be well-informed advocates of outdoor recreation.

Public/Private Cooperation to Expand Recreational Opportunities

Another priority issue is the need to expand partnerships between public agencies and the private sector in order to expand park and recreation opportunities. Non-profit organizations, private for-profit groups, public agencies, and individuals all have different roles in providing outdoor recreation. The key to successful partnerships is to match resources to achieve mutual goals.

The private sector manages recreation lands, offers services that transport people to recreation areas, conducts courses that teach recreation skills, provides comfort services on public lands, and produces equipment that allows people to enjoy all kinds of recreational activity.

Private enterprise is a major supplier of certain kinds of activities – camping, skiing, golfing, and boating through marina facilities. Other activities, such as hunting and long-distance hiking, depend on the use of private farm and forest lands.

Private, not-for-profit groups, such as youth clubs, church groups, community associations, and other independent, voluntary organizations, fill important recreational needs. Non-profit organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy and local land trusts, have the ability to act quickly to protect important recreation and habitat lands.

Mutually Beneficial Partnerships

Outdoor recreation opportunities are an essential component of sound community development. Public officials seek to capitalize on the increased importance of the quality of life in business, residential, and retirement decisions. Broad regional strategies attempt to lure vacationers, second-home buyers, and industries. Trails, greenways, and river conservation initiatives are publicized as quality-of-life benefits.

Economic development and tourism are increasingly linked. On the coast, for example, many special events are supported by local chambers of commerce to attract tourists. The King Mackerel Tournament, held each fall in Carteret County, attracts approximately 900 boats with an average of 2.5 people who spend four nights in the area. This influx of visitors is an obvious economic benefit to the local area and state. In addition, Carteret, Craven, and Pamlico counties market their region to North Carolinians through the organization Coastal Carolina Pleasures. Coast Hosts, another consortium of coastal county chambers of commerce, markets North Carolina beaches outside the state.

Whitewater rafting in western North Carolina also aids tourism and economic development. The Nantahala River sports no less than 15 private outfitters and seven semi-public/institutional outfitters that provide rubber rafts, kayaks, canoes and guides for river trips. The US Forest Service estimated river users at 263,269 in 1996.

The actions outside the boundaries of a recreation area can affect the public resources or experience. The location, design, and scale of private capital investment near public resources presents opportunities to achieve mutually desirable goals – protecting resources and providing economic benefits to the community.

The North Carolina state parks system and Carolina Power & Light Company have cooperated on a number of projects. CP&L has funded the state's production of environmental education learning experiences, and many CP&L employees have volunteered and completed park construction and maintenance projects. Duke Power funded a statewide park advisory committee meeting, and the J.W. Moore advertising firm gave the state park system free publicity work.

Some communities have added desirable support services in areas adjacent to public recreational resources, balancing conservation and economic needs. Bryson City has assessed the tourism activity from the Great Smoky Mountain Railway, a 70-mile train ride to the Nantahala Gorge, and the influx of river floaters and decided to upgrade its Island Park and river walkway to better accommodate tourists.

Communities and business leaders recognize the value of parks in revitalizing waterfronts and downtown areas. Efforts typically involve many different groups. In New Bern, a waterfront walkway connecting Union Point Park with Bicentennial Park was constructed through funding efforts of the Tourism Development Authority, downtown redevelopment organizations, and city officials. The Park and Recreation Department maintains the walkway, which is popular with both tourists and local residents.

Funding

Partnerships with the private sector, both for-profit and nonprofit, can help to provide services and facilities despite budgetary pressures. Involvement with private business through concession agreements and co-sponsorship can generate revenues for parks or reduce operating costs.

The North Carolina Zoo is an excellent example of public/private cooperation to expand outdoor recreational opportunities. The Zoological Society, a nonprofit organization, was formed in 1968 as a volunteer effort to interest state officials and private citizens in a state zoo. Since those beginning years, private funds have purchased almost all the plant and animal populations and contributed substantially to construction efforts as well. The original 1,300 acres were donated by Randolph County, and construction costs have been primarily supported by state funding. The Zoological Society also sponsors a gift shop, the profits of which cycle back into the park's operating budget.

Co-sponsorship of special events by the public and private sectors is becoming more commonplace in North Carolina. For example, the Charlotte Park and Recreation Department reluctantly decided that it could no longer allow dogs at its outdoor special events, but wanted to offer something special to its canine friends. The result was a special event specifically for dogs and dog owners called "Bark in the Park." The event was sponsored by a dog biscuit company and featured a day-long celebration plus promotional dog biscuit giveaways.

The key to mutually beneficial co-sponsorship is to ensure that both the corporation or organization and the park and recreation department meet their objectives. Generally, the park and recreation department wants to provide more recreational opportunities, but finds it difficult to expand services due to budgetary constraints.

Corporations are willing to donate funds for community service in exchange for publicity and an opportunity to market their products and services. When special events are co-sponsored with nonprofit organizations, it is generally to benefit the nonprofit organization. Receipts are rarely returned to the park and recreation department, primarily due to legal restrictions that require receipts to be paid into the general fund.

But public/private co-sponsored special events can directly benefit local recreation agencies using nonprofit foundations. The annual Lazy Daze Festival, a craft fair co-sponsored by the Cary Park and Recreation Department and a local bank, began 18 years ago. The first festival generated approximately a \$1,000 profit, which went into the town's general fund. The co-sponsors subsequently established Lazy Daze as a non-profit civic organization with covenants and policies for operation. This allowed any profits realized to be set aside in a separate account. Since that time, donations made from festival proceeds have benefitted civic projects, such as a new playground, an amphitheater covering, and equipment for the park and recreation department.

Services

Joint sponsorship programs take place when a parks and recreation department works cooperatively with another public, commercial, or private non-profit agency. The most popular forms of joint sponsorship are special events, youth athletic programs, adult athletics, special populations programs, senior citizens programs, and aquatics.

Providing wellness programs is another example of a joint sponsorship effort between the private and public sectors. Wellness programs promote disease prevention through positive changes in personal lifestyles, including improved diet and exercise. To reduce health costs and increase productivity, many corporations have instituted health promotion programs for employees, ranging from elaborate facilities to comprehensive wellness programs. Corporations without their own staff or facilities will often contract for on-site activities or reimburse their employees for off-site fee programs. Local park and recreation departments can work cooperatively with businesses to develop wellness programs and to make facilities available for sports and fitness. Complete wellness programs should become more prevalent in North Carolina, and local recreation departments can offer their expertise.

Incentives Needed for Private Sector

Incentives are needed to encourage the private sector to help provide more park and recreation opportunities. Reducing disincentives such as public liability requirements on private land and short lease periods for entrepreneurial investments in public recreation areas encourage private sector partnerships.

Diverse partnership arrangements exist in the North Carolina state parks —from Boy Scout troops helping maintain trails, to concessionaires running marinas, to volunteers selling interpretive materials. These vary from informal, ad hoc arrangements, to short-term contracts with nonprofit groups, to 30-year leases with marina concessionaires. Revenues collected from concessions reduce state appropriations to the Division; therefore, no real gain in funding is realized to meet additional needs.

In North Carolina, the state protects a landowner who allows a state trail to cross his/her property from being responsible for injuries to trail users, barring gross negligence by the landowner. This is sometimes not sufficient incentive. Some private property owners want total protection, including compensation for any property damages incurred from fire or vandalism, and enforcement of lawful use. County law officials have been reluctant to enforce trespass grievances. Also, the cost of maintaining land that is open to the public can be high, and some landowners want a financial return. The general population and recreationists, in particular, should be educated to adoption of a land ethic that promotes acceptable behavior on all private lands.

Successful efforts to increase recreational access to private lands must, for the most part, originate at the state and local levels because of state liability and trespass laws and local taxing practices.

Local governments can encourage the private sector to provide outdoor recreational opportunities. Zoning can be used to trade off greater density of residential development for provision of open space and recreation amenities. In North Carolina, some communities require land set- asides or cash from builders to mitigate the effects of new development and to provide recreation areas needed as a result of the development.

The city of Jacksonville, for example, assesses proposed developments by examining the location of existing parks, the need for additional parks, and the development' s density. The city then decides between three options: land donated for the city to develop; money given in lieu of land; or a recreation area developed as part of the project. Using the ordinance, the city of Jacksonville has ensured the availability of future recreational opportunities and improved the quality of life for its citizens.

Coordination Among Public Providers

Another issue identified was the need for better coordination among public agencies providing recreation. In the past 25 years, state and local governments have received significant funding assistance from the federal LWCF program. When large appropriations were available in the 1970s, funding was available for both park projects and technical assistance. During the 1980s and since, budget reductions have cut these programs. The need for both funding and technical assistance still exists, however.

Local agencies want improved technical assistance from the state. Private, municipal, and county agencies, along with their citizen advisory committees, want additional services from the Division and from Recreation Resources Service. Services desired include educational field seminars; information services; planning local projects; measuring park use; developing per capita standards to justify funding, staffing, and maintaining recreational services; facilitating technical assistance from universities; enhancing their relationships with federal agencies; and marketing techniques to increase public participation.

A county-wide or regional approach to planning and facilities would eliminate the unnecessary expense of duplicate services. Opportunities also exist for cooperation with public land-managing agencies that do not currently provide recreational services. Recreational services can be expanded by using suitable land and facilities when they are available.

Community Schools

A good example of cooperative use of public land and facilities is the Community School Program. The North Carolina Community School Act of 1977 provided funds for community school coordinators and provided the community with the right to use the schools. North Carolina's enabling legislation permits, but does not mandate, the use of schools by other individuals and organizations.

Currently, each school system can choose to participate and administer the program, but all systems that accept the program and receive the annual appropriation are to facilitate community use. In some school systems, this money has been used to fund a public relations position or an art teacher rather than to support the community school program. Other areas of concern include questions of liability, responsibility and authority, extent of school property use, and financial arrangements for expenses. Nothing can be more basic to the success of a jointly used system than an agreement that clearly states the parameters within which the two agencies – the school and the recreation department – must operate.

Ideally, the community school concept promotes the well-planned and efficient use of public school facilities for both educational and recreational purposes. The program eliminates duplications in programming, funding for land acquisition, and construction of facilities. It can provide recreational opportunities in a city or county seeking to more fully use its buildings and grounds.

Use of Volunteers

Volunteers have greatly assisted park systems, working for state and local governments in a variety of conservation, maintenance and programming areas. The thousands of hours that are donated annually are a huge boost to North Carolina's parks and recreation providers.

Volunteers are not always a solution to every need or appropriate for every park. Although useful in a supplementary role for programming and maintenance tasks, they are of lesser value in administration. In addition, there is a dollar cost involved in using volunteers if insurance and

workers compensation coverage are required and if paid staff are needed to supervise them. Volunteers often require additional management and supervision costs and cause problems that result from lack of a regular, skilled work force on payroll. In spite of these additional costs, volunteers are a bargain.

Where volunteers become a significant presence, they often create a new management need to ensure that staff and volunteer services are integrated harmoniously.

—Phyllis Myers
State Parks in a New Era

Many potential problems can be circumvented, however, if a volunteer program is well thought out and developed. An agency must publicize the needs of a particular park, program, or project to recruit volunteers. It is beneficial to attract a wide variety of volunteers, including both individuals and organizations. Both parties should agree on clear goals and areas of responsibilities. Volunteers should be trained, if necessary, to the skill level required for particular jobs. And they should always be trained in public relations because they will be representing the park to visitors and will need a good understanding of its management philosophy. When possible, volunteers should be put to work at what they know best. Create good will by giving recognition, encouraging cooperation among groups and agencies, and publicizing accomplishments.

IMPROVING THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM

The past fifteen years have seen significant attention directed toward the North Carolina state parks system. Progress has been made in interpretation and education, resource protection, land acquisition, operations, capital improvements and planning but much more progress is needed. Over 32,000 acres are needed to complete existing park units, and approximately \$300 million in capital improvement needs have been identified. Continued progress over the next decade is crucial.

Establishment of North Carolina's first state park, Mount Mitchell, came in response to threats to its natural resources. While this initial acquisition was completed with appropriated state funds, subsequent expansion in the number and size of park units was accomplished without such appropriations. For example, Fort Macon State Park was donated as federal surplus property.

Federal funding and private donations have played a major role in the expansion of the state parks system. Public works programs during the 1930s assisted in the creation of nine state parks. Donations and LWCF assistance supported major park system expansion from 1960 to 1980. Through reliance on donations, federal assistance, and sporadic funding, the state has not developed the state parks system in response to priority needs (Table I-1). Rather, until recently, the development of the system has been piecemeal and reactive. A State Parks Expansion Committee is currently assessing the existing system and identifying priorities for expansion of the state parks system to include biological, geological, recreational, scenic and archaeological

resources not adequately represented and protected by the existing system of parks.

Past state parks study commissions have been successful in gaining increased support for the state parks system. Even with increased support, however, many needs remain unmet. Studies by legislative study commissions in 1979, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991, and 1993, as well as studies by the State Goals and Policy Board and state auditor, have consistently reported on the need for land acquisition, improvements to the physical plant, adequate staffing, and increased and steady funding.

A \$35 million state parks bond issue approved in 1993 gave the state parks system its largest single appropriation ever. The money funded capital improvements and land acquisition projects across North Carolina. The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund was established in 1994, and it has greatly assisted the state parks system in addressing its backlog of needs.

Systemwide Plan for the State Parks System

The 1987 State Parks Act requires that a systemwide plan be prepared every five years. The recently completed 2001 Systemwide Plan describes recent accomplishments, evaluates the system in all program resources, and summarizes public recreational needs. It also contains a five-year action plan for the state parks system.

The Systemwide Plan and its action plan are incorporated as a part of this SCORP. The Systemwide Plan is available through the NC Division of Parks and Recreation's web site:

<http://ils.unc.edu/parkproject/explore/division>